War on the World: Ecological Inflections in the Films of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi

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> If we do not undertake a serious effort of analysis, one day sooner or later we may well find ourselves at war and powerless not only to act but even to make judgments. And the first thing we must do is assess the traditions from which, until now, we have consciously more or less drawn sustenance. — Simone Weil, "Reflections on War" (171)

> The white man possesses a quality that has enabled him to make his way: *disrespect*…. The white man does not allow himself to be hypnotized by anything. — Henri Michaux, *A Barbarian in Asia* (8)[1]

Much has been written about the camera's collusion in the technologies of modern encroachment: the weaponizing of vision (Virilio, 1989), the conquest of space (Solnit, 2003), the burning of fossil fuels (Bozak, 2012), and colonial empire building (Ben-Ghiat, 2015).[2] What Nadia Bozak has called the "cinematic footprint," cinema's energetic participation in the age of the Anthropocene, has only recently begun to be considered in the discipline of film studies. In the last fifteen years or so, the emergent subfields of ecocinema and critical animal studies have in turn helped to think through the relationship between ecology, animals, and film in ways that intersect with other radical critiques of forms of human violence and anthropogenic aggression. While their films routinely attend to human exploitation and destruction of nature and animals, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi are rarely shown or discussed in an ecological context.[3] Yet it is significant that the violence in their films extends beyond that among and against human beings.

By recognizing that violence is perpetrated by humans against animals and the environment I am proposing an expanded conceptualization of power that sets Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's work apart from more conventional political, even biopolitical, critiques of inter-human violence. Their more-than-human approach to violence may be seen as an

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1 This quote appears at the opening of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's *Images d'orient: Tourisme vandal* (2001). In English, Michaux's closing sentence ("Le blanc ne se laisse arrêter par rien") translates a little unusually but makes sense when one examines the passage in full. Michaux compares the religiosity of the Hindu, who "feels that he is connected to everything," with the spiritual emptiness of the white American, hence the latter's inability to be "hypnotized" by what he encounters.

2 Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*. Patrick Camiller, trans. London: Verso, 1989; Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*. New York: Penguin, 2003; Nadia Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2012; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.

3 References to animals and nature are not uncommon in descriptions of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's work, but they are rarely the focus of the analysis. Nor are the filmmakers considered part of a canon of ecocinematic works. However, their 1994 short *Animali Criminali* was included in the programme Screening Nature: Flora, Fauna and the Moving Image, curated by Anat Pick and Silke Panse, 18-19 May, 2013, the Whitechapel Gallery, London. See also Anat Pick, "Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi's *Criminal Animals*," *Screen* 56.1 (2015), pp. 95-102.

artistic corrective to the feeble political and legal attempts to recognize environmental destruction as a veritable and serious crime. In some of their key works, *Dal Polo all'Equatore* (1986), *Animali Criminali* (1994), the First World War Trilogy, including *Prigionieri della guerra* (1995), *Su tutte le vette è pace* (1998), and *Oh! Uomo* (2004), *Pays Barbare* (2013), and *Topografia aerea* (2007), the deep structure of the orchestrated human assaults on people, animals, and the earth is revealed as a central concern.

Beyond the "green" practice of recycled cinema, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's highlighting of violence carried out against a range of vulnerable beings—from indigenous people to native animals as well as against the landscape itself—calls for an ecocentric appreciation of their films. The pivotal historical events that animate their work are also those that signal watershed moments of ecological ruin: the use of gas in East Africa and the First World War, and the colonial obliteration of wildlife. I read these acts of destruction not as arbitrary eruptions of violence but as a concerted war effort against the earth itself.

I. War on the Earth: Ecocide

Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's collaborative body of work emerged in the mid-1970s, coinciding with attempts to include the crime of "ecocide" in international legal frameworks for peace and the protection of minorities. Ecocide, "the extensive destruction of ecosystems," was first noted by American biologist Arthur Galston at the 1970 Conference on War and National Responsibility. Galston spoke in the shadow of the devastation wreaked by Agent Orange in Vietnam.[4] Subsequent decades saw further endeavors by academics, grassroots groups, and the institutions and committees of the United Nations to recognize environmental destruction as an international crime (alongside the crime of genocide).[5] These

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[4] See Anja Gauger, Mai Pouye Rabatel-Fernel, Louise Kulbicki, Damien Short and Polly Higgins, "Ecocide is the Missing 5th Crime Against Peace," a report by the Ecocide Project, Human Rights Consortium, University of London, 2012, https://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/4830/1/Ecocide_research_report_19_July_13.pdf, accessed on 12 September 2018. The United Nations International Law Commission's (ILC) "Code" (that became the document of the Rome Statute of the ICC) includes four international crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of aggression. The fifth would have been ecocide. Currently, environmental crime does not exist as a separate offence. It is only, and limitedly, recognized as an element of war crimes and therefore as wilfully caused: "the Rome Statute's Article 8 (b IV) on War Crimes is the only provision in international law to hold a perpetrator responsible for environmental damage. Of course, the Article does, however, limit the crime to wartime situations and to intentional damage" (Gauger et al. 11).

[5] In 1973, for example, Richard A. Falk published "Environmental Warfare and Ecocide: Facts, Appraisal, and Proposals," *Security Dialogue* 4.1 (1973), http://rbdi.bruylant.be/public/modele/rbdi/content/files/RBDI%201973/RBDI%201973-1/RBDI%201973.1%20-%20pp.%201%20%C3%83%C2%A0%2027%20-%20Richard%20Falk.pdf, accessed 12 September 2018. For a detailed history of the failed attempts to criminalise ecocide, see the website Eradicating Ecocide, whose mission is "mobilizing criminal law to protect people and the planet" by implementing ecocide as an international crime of the Rome Statute, http://eradicatingecocide.com/the-mission/, accessed 12 September 2018.

efforts failed: "ecocide, a concept that was familiar and supported by many as one that should be enshrined in international law, was dropped by the ILC [United Nations International Law Commission] in 1996" (Gauger et al. 4).[6]

The collective failure to include environmental destruction in the list of international crimes that threaten peace and security hampers our ability to comprehend and respond to ecocidal events during war and peacetime alike. Where legal and political frameworks have thus far fallen short, art has perhaps fared better. One striking feature of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's project is the persistent if under-theorized place afforded to the large-scale damage to nature and animals wrought by the technologies of war, totalitarianism, and colonial incursion. Although classical humanists in many respects, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi expose the common anthropocentrism of colonial and ecological destruction. Their work traces the interdependence between colonialism and human exceptionalism. As Laura Hall explains, the "divide between humans and the 'natural' world cannot be understood […] without contextualizing its origins in the Eurocentric project of genocide, ecocide, and control over Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous lands" (Hall 288).

Locating the "ecological inflections" in Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's films bypasses some of the difficulties that have beset the legal category of ecocide. Disagreement on what constitutes the crime of ecocide revolves around the issues of intent and the specificity of war. Should the perpetration of ecocide presuppose the intention to commit environmental destruction? If motivated by financial gain rather than by active conflict, how might one determine ecocide during peacetime? Although a significant portion of their films focuses on theatres of war, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi recognize systemic violence against the natural world on and beyond the battlefield. In many of their films, both those that feature actual war footage (e.g. *Dal Polo all'Equatore*, the war trilogy, or *Pays Barbare*), and those that do not (*Images d'Orient: Tourisme vandal* [2001]*, Criminali Animali*, or *Frammenti elettrici No. 1-5* [2001-2005]), warlike violence functions as a source and underlying force of the images that Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi acquire, critique, and reconfigure.

At stake is, of course, the definition of war and the extent to which we are willing to follow Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi in the "elemental" role they assign to violence. The paradox of the creative, or creative-destructive powers attributed to violence in world (not just human) history is the filmmakers' direct response to Italian futurism, but it is more than

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[6] Reasons for eliminating ecocide from the Rome Statute are likely politically and financially motivated, and related to the proliferation of nuclear arms (if not to nuclear power more generally). Some states included ecocide in their own penal codes, but the effectiveness of such laws is in some doubt (Gauger et al. 12).

that. Violence comes to look and feel trans-historical, primal, even planetary.[7] Its foundational status is even more clearly demonstrable in relation to nonhumans precisely because animals and the earth are excluded from the official histories of war. Animals appear, as if haphazardly, in the final "war album" section of *Pays Barbare*, or in footage of a burning forest and dying horse in *Oh! Uomo*. If Dinesh Wadiwel is right to treat "our systems of violence towards animals precisely as constituting a war" (Wadiwel 3), then crimes against the earth are not simply war-*like*, but constitute war itself.[8] Violence in Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's films is nearly always orgiastic; its excesses make it difficult to commandeer or restrain. Herein lies the tragedy of the "organized" violence of war: that it is almost always *dis*organized and thus (even when goal-oriented and seemingly effective), historically and politically unstable.

Whereas many of their films are dedicated to specific human conflicts, most notably the First World War, warring acts reverberate across the Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's oeuvre. In many of the films, systems of violent encroachment take on an expanded notion of war against people, animals, and nature. Understood in this way, war is not always a discrete event but operates ubiquitously as what Wadiwel calls "substructure," subtending the conflictual relationship between humans and the living world.[9] The presence of Alpine landscapes, savannas and grasslands, of hunting expeditions, or the pitting of animals one against the other are neither incidental nor allegorical but integral to the structures of power that Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's work probes. Ricci Lucchi writes:

> The artist can only use his own work to fight against the violence that is affecting us, in the West as well as in the East, Asia, Africa. Right from the very start, our work has been against violence: violence against the environment, against animals, one man against another. The first apparition of man in the white desert (*From the Pole to the Equator*), man's first apparition in the white desert is sporting a gun, that he uses to kill a bear, namely, the first living being he encounters…. (Ricci Lucchi 13)[10]

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[7] At the end of the Sarajevo segment of *Angela's Diaries* (2017), the film completed after her death, Ricci Lucchi is visibly listless, troubled by the absurd aggression of the Balkans war. Talking to camera, it is clear that what Ricci Lucchi is trying to understand are not the historical conditions that led to the war, but the deeper compulsion to violence that animates this history. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's approach to violence strongly resonates with Wislawa Szymborska's seminal poem on the same war, "Hatred," (*Poems New and Collected: 1957-1997*. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, trans. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1998, p. 230).

[8] War as the underlying human relation to animals is the subject Wadiwel's *The War Against Animals* (2015). See also his "The War Against Animals: Domination, Law and Sovereignty," *Griffith Law Review* 18.2 (2009), pp. 283-297.

[9] "If war forms the substructure of relationality between human and non human entities," asks Wadiwel in *The War Against Animals*, "then how might we use this understanding to appraise *animal welfare* and *animal rights* approaches to the question of domination?" (36). The idea of war against as a substructure is relevant to Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's analyses of systemic violence against humans, animals, and the environment.

[10] Ricci Lucchi's statement is found in a slightly truncated version in Andrea Lissoni's "Scrutinize, Interrogate, Scrape. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi Explore Without Surrendering to History," *Yervant Gianikian*

The difference between a warring and a sporting gun in the footage we see can be difficult to discern. Difficult, too, is the classification of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's work as either war or as anti-war films. It more readily invokes what Alisa Lebow calls the "unwar film": "non-generic," "minor key films" that "position themselves neither for nor against in sectarian terms, but instead do the destabilizing work of unthreading the very fabric of the militarist paradigm" (Lebow 460). Certainly, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's imagery is not "minor key"; it is often graphic and direct. But a non-sectarian subversion of the militarist paradigm is at the heart of the work. Non-sectarianism extends to non-speciesism that represents the harm done to humans, animals, and the planet as intricately interconnected.

Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's deep structural analysis of the mechanisms of war is historically-specific and archetypal. The utopian thrust of their project that seeks not only to critique but to ameliorate violence is, I claim, rooted in an expansive, ecologically inflected approach to power that regards human violence pathologically, as directed against the phenomenon of life itself.

II. War and Peace: Franchetti's Hand

"The true hero, the true subject, the center of the *Iliad* is force," wrote Simone Weil in the opening to her 1940 essay on Homer's *Iliad*: "Force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man's flesh shrinks away. In this work, at all times, the human spirit is shown as modified by its relations with force, as swept away, blinded by the very force it imagined it could handle, as deformed by the weight of the force it submits to" (Weil, 2005, 3). A similar understanding of force pervades Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's oeuvre, the proper subject of which is power, abstractly conceived and in its concrete historical manifestations. By the ecological inflection of their films, therefore, I am not simply pointing to the nonhuman victims of power, but to the conceptualization of power itself as ahuman. In her 1933 essay "Reflections on War," Weil insisted that Europe's immediate and future survival depends on a correct understanding of war, outside of the ideologies that have traditionally defined it.[11] Failing to be sufficiently analytical shall prove fatal, Weil warns,

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and Angela Ricci Lucchi NON NON NON. HangarBicocca Critical Notebook n.1 Curated by Andrea Lissoni in collaboration with Chiara Bertola, edited by Francesca Trovalusci, https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/psi-dotcom-prd/HangarBicocca/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/quaderno-critico-ENG3.pdf, p. 11, accessed 15 September 2018.

[11] The essay condemns left revolutionary wars as subject to the deadly apparatus of war. Weil would eventually denounce her earlier pacifism (once she awakes to the full horrors of National Socialism), but her essential understanding of the dangers of war—whether from the right or the left—remained constant throughout her writing.

not just physically and politically, but morally. In their careful parsing of war, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi seem to heed Weil's warning. As in Weil's *Iliad*, so in *Dal Polo all'Equatore*, power assumes a strange autonomy. The film's locations vary, but the operation of power, the "true hero" of the film, remains the same.

The forensic nature of their project is evident from Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's use of the "analytical camera," a purpose-built device that "lets us get close to, even enter deep within each individual frame. We have control over the speed of the film, the details, the colour. We can freeze and reproduce the archive material in unusual ways" (Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, 2017, 8). The device allows the filmmakers to explore the material, revealing gestures, qualities, and expressions unseen in the original footage. The "analytical camera" is at once "vivisectionist" (taking apart the footage, carving into the flesh of the film) and resuscitative (breathing new life into old, fragile material). Chiara Bertola describes it as an "eye which recovers and interrogates the images of History and puts them back into motion" (Bertola 4). The object of the "analytical camera" is, then, not only critical (diagnostic) but also clinical (palliative): it exposes the workings of power in order to alleviate it through art. The gestures seized upon and replayed confer what Stefan Ramstedt calls a "second life" on the dying and the dead, breaking with the repressive origins of the material.[12] Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi are interested in the strange vicissitudes of power propelled by technology that govern the collision and destruction of bodies, but, crucially, too, in the resistance of those bodies to the relentless operations of power.

The material of *Dal Polo all'Equatore* is derived from a single source: the film archive of early cinema pioneer Luca Comerio (1878-1940).[13] In 1982, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi discovered and purchased Comerio's archive, which became the basis of several of their films. Their handling of the Comerio footage is at once an act of salvage, and of what in his discussion of found footage work, Thomas Elsaesser discusses as cinephillic appropriation: "a gesture of love," "an act of acquiring expertise," and "a claim to ownership" (Elsaesser 1). Moreover, as found material, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's film is, as Elsaesser puts it, "made beautiful and special by the combination of a recent loss of practical use and its perishable or fragile materiality" (Elsaesser 2). Indeed, *Dal Polo all'Equatore* opens with a hand-painted intertitle proclaiming the state of neglect of

[12] See Stefan Ramstedt, "Work Ethics. On *Pays Barbare*," *La Furia Umana* 21, http://www.lafuriaumana.it/index.php/49-archive/lfu-21/259-stefan-ramstedt-work-ethics-on-pays-barbare, accessed 23 September 2018.

[13] Comerio is an ambivalent figure. He worked closely with the Italian military. After Mussolini came to power in 1922, Comerio petitioned to work in the Istituto Luce (the Light Institute), founded in 1924 during the Fascist era. It acted as a film propaganda arm for the fascist regime.

Comerio's original footage and of Comerio himself. The intertitle takes the form of a dedication: "To Luca Comerio, pioneer of documentary cinema, who died, forgotten, in 1940. The chemical amnesia, the mould, the physical decay of the image, is the state that surrounds the filmic materials." The bearing and baring of the frame's material decay links *Dal Polo all'Equatore*, with Brakhagian flourish, to the tradition of the avant-garde. Occasionally, the foregrounding of materiality produces a heightened abstraction that seems to mitigate against the film's political legibility. But in the oscillation between figuration and abstraction, politics and form, the image never loses its footing in the histories that gave rise to it. Fragility belongs to the filmstrip as much as it does to the physical bodies in the image. It marks the film's intertwining of human and planetary time: the history of modern Italy (and its archives) enfolded into the order of natural history. A different set of temporalities belongs to different orders of violence: the "fast" violence meted against colonized people, soldiers, and animals, and the "slow violence" suffered by the landscape and the earth, depleted and rendered toxic by war.[14]

Dal Polo all'Equatore takes its name from Comerio's lost documentary from 1929. The original film contained footage of Alpine train journeys, colonial and hunting expeditions, and scenes from the battlefields of the First World War. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi reshot, hand-tinted, re-edited and slowed down the footage, adding a soundtrack. The new film calls up the old, but voids it of its original athleticism. The film begins with a 10-minute sequence of a train ride through the Alps. The railway and the cinema camera display their prowess in the early cinematic device of the phantom ride. The mounted camera snakes through the landscape, accompanied by Keith Ullrich and Charles Anderson's ominous score. The next sequence switches from land to sea as ship, camera, and gun collude to produce (and reproduce) the spectacle of animal death in the killing of a polar bear. From there, the film travels east, through Persia, Africa, India, and Africa again (including Tangiers, Eritrea, and Uganda). Following a long hunting segment in the middle of the film, the final section is made up of footage of the First World War, appended by a standalone fragment that reverts from the battlefield to the domesticity of home. But even here, in the comfort and safety of home, violence resurfaces. The final fragment features a bourgeois family callously toying with a rabbit. What we see when we look at their faces is joy.

By most accounts, the middle portion of the film features Baron Raimondo Franchetti (1889-1935), "the Italian version of T. E. Lawrence," according to Gianikian. The location is

[14] On the concept of slow violence see Ron Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013.

likely Uganda, 1910. The Franchetti hunting scenes are some of the most arresting in the film, not for their gratuitous violence but because they illustrate most clearly Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's unique understanding of power. On first viewing, one is reminded of Peter Kubelka's *Unsere Afrikareise*/ *Our African Trip*/ (1966), a precursor of sorts to the hunting segments in *Dal Polo*, in which power is identified with the rich Austrians whom Kubelka films and scorns. Kubelka's use of non-sync sound amplifies his subjects' cruelty and wantonness. Kubelka and Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's respective attitudes to the operation of power result in important differences in tone between the two films. Kubelka's irony does not transcend the violence we see; it exposes its perpetrators as hateful and gauche. No less graphic, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's hunting scenes strike a mournful note in which we can detect an alternative to violence. An important device in *Dal Polo* through which power is analyzed, reconceptualized, and alleviated is slow motion. I want to single one moment in which a transformation of the image takes place, and an alternative to what, in another context, Carol Anderson called "white rage," is glimpsed.[15]

In a moment of extended animation, Franchetti reaches out a hand towards the dying gazelle he had shot. As he leans down from the top right of the frame, diagonally toward the animal below, Franchetti's "handshake" looks almost tender, as if seeking assurance that the approach is truly welcome [Figures 1-6].

[15] See Carol Anderson's *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017. Anderson argues that systemic, institutional violence against people of colour, though rationalized and organized, is, in fact, an expression of rage. The same rings true for me of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's understanding of violence as simultaneously structural and suffused with primal passions.

Figures 1-6. Franchetti's hand, *Dal Polo all'Equatore*

The spell is broken when the animal recoils and, collapsing sideways, dies. Franchetti grabs the horns, turns his face towards the camera and smiles broadly in the typical position of a trophy shot. In what sense am I claiming that power in this scene is expropriated and alleviated? How does the slowing down of motion depict power, as Weil does, as external to the man who wields it? If it momentarily resides inside Franchetti, power is neither owned nor controlled by him. And how in this scene is violence transcended, rendering visible an alternative, pacific relation between man and animal?

The interruption of continuous movement by Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's frame-by-frame motion and repetition reveals the so-called unconscious of images. As in the "cine-seizures" of Martin Arnold or Ken Jacobs, or the more recent digital flicker films of the Neozoon collective, the interstices between frames reveal what Michael Zryd describes as "moments of unconscious desire and repression unwittingly trapped between the 24 frames per second which ground cinematic movement" (Zryd 2004).[16] Franchetti's tentative reaching discloses a mixture of affects: fear, desire, and longing, invisible to the eye in normal speed. The pacific gesture revealed (or produced) by the analytical camera retrieves a convivial trace in the midst of violence. For all its intended triumphalism, the hunt as we now see it not only fails to extinguish its object, whose presence opposite Franchetti is strangely magnetic, but registers a peaceable encounter between man and animal, made visible through the fragmentation of motion. The profound ambivalence of the Franchetti sequence suggests the illusory nature of human power. Franchetti's virile posturing seems compensatory, pathetic. Franchetti's hand is divested of its murderous intent through the microgestures revealed by

[16] Whereas, like Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, Martin Arnold works analogically, Neozoon work with and on the digital archive. They conduct their analysis via available gif technology using uploaded videos on websites like YouTube. The result of their deconstruction of hunting videos is familiar, however. It uncovers the gender dynamics and psychosexual pathology of recreational killing. See, for example, *Buck Fever* (2012), *Big Game* (2013), *Shake Shake Shake* (2016), www.neozoon.org

the "analytical camera." The friendly overture construed by slow motion is the convivial equivalent of the concept of "microaggression," used to describe expressions of (mainly racial) hostility in seemingly benign situations.[17] The Franchetti sequence reveals an unknowing convivial trace in the overtly violent encounter: a gesture of *microconviviality*. The scene thus offers a corrective to violence in the form of pure potentiality: slow motion brings into view the peaceful possibility secreted in the event.[18]

A second effect of the scene is the equivalence between killer and victim, which Weil's analysis of power is explicit about: "Force is as pitiless to the man who possesses it, or thinks he does, as it is to its victims; the second it crushes, the first it intoxicates" (Weil, 2005, 11). Franchetti's power, then, is not his own, but enters him as if from the outside. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's technique captures both the intoxication of power enjoyed by the victor, and the illusory (because extrinsic and passing) nature of his superiority. Power subsumes Franchetti and the gazelle and turns them both into things. "Such is the nature of force," says Weil: "Its power of converting a man into a thing is a double one, and in its application double-edged. To the same degree, though in different fashions, those who use it and those who endure it are turned to stone" (Weil, 2005, 26). Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's poetics of slow motion expose the limits of Franchetti's agency. They carefully stage his objectification (by history, by the cinematic apparatus), which his oblivious smile fails to mask.

Franchetti's desire to possess exotic people and animals illustrates what for Michaux is the white man's failure to encounter the world in its plenitude. "Disrespect being empty-handed, must fabricate" (Michaux 8). Because impoverished, or empty, disrespect fuels the traveler/conqueror's ceaseless extraction of earthly goods. In its need to fill the void, empty-handedness fabricates a gun that turns living animals into dead trophies. The process leaves the void unfilled, and desire unfulfilled. The Franchetti segment coalesces the film's overlapping modes of violence. "Luca Comerio was the operator in this section, and accompanied the Baron, one of Mussolini's future secret agents in Africa. The white hunter […] is shown among the crowd of naked black bodies. The camera lingers on the bodies of women. The Italian flag is dragged out of the river by a column of naked black men. The

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[17] The term "microaggression" dates back to the 1970s, but has gained popularity in the last decade. See in particular Claudia Rankine's work *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014). I am using an inverted form of the term to designate convivial traces that may escape our attention.

[18] My use of "potentiality" echoes Giorgio Agamben's discussion of the term in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). For Agamben, potentiality designates the possibility of something to "not-be." Thus, the actuality of the hunt consists of the potentiality of the hunt's non-being. The potential to not-be is, I argue, made visible through the microconvivial gesture.

caption for this sequence is: 'Everywhere, Italy has flown and continues to fly this glorious flag'" (Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, 2017, 10).

The African hunt is part and parcel of the regime of colonial domination. But Franchetti's hand, entering the frame (to borrow Robert Lumley's phrase) in a gesture of interspecies rapprochement occasions a kind of benign futurity. "The temporality we are presented here," argues Miriam de Rosa, "is one that allows re-visions (that is to say, literally, to see again)" (31). And in insisting on the "profound vitality of their cinema" as an "elective connection between cinema and life" (de Rosa 31), one is tempted to read the filmmakers' surpassing of the specificity and exceptionalism of human life. The connection between film and world allows for a seeing anew that brings forth the materialization of alternative relations between past and present, the living and the dead, humans and animals.

III. War and Fate: The One and the Many

Living beings are canon-fodder in the impersonal war machine. The soldiers, who in the First World War segment of *Dal Polo* charge forth in a hail of bullets, are picked out one by one and litter the battlefield with their corpses. Though they never lose sight of individuals (Lumley 81-82), Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi are just as careful to render visible the wider mechanisms that subsume each one. This double bind, to beings and structures, guides their approach to the archive, including that of the war trilogy.

"For the soldier who fell with a bullet in his head," Karl Ove Knausgård writes of the First World War, "death was the consequence of relationships neither he nor any other single individual could guide, control, or stop; it was out of everyone's hands, it was part of the collectivity, or the higher powers in the collectivity, and the violence that was suddenly unleashed escalated with tremendous speed and horrific power. The complexity was dizzyingly greater, the number of people involved almost infinite in comparison, but the mechanism, the powers at work in the collectivity's annihilation of the individual, were the same." (Knausgård 2017). By "the same," Knausgård means the powers that governed the lives of characters in ancient Norse sagas. Modernity, which champions free will and the self-madeness of individuals, obscures the presence of forces that confound personal choice. "Never once have I thought that a life could be chosen," Knausgård declares as he ponders his affinity with the sagas' remote inhabitants. If there is an archaic impulse in Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, it is their careful conflation of individual existence and the impersonal mechanism revealed by what might be called the "archival view." For the archive implies a collectivity from whose constituent parts a mechanism can come into view. Working with

historians at the Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra in Rovereto, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi were particularly interested in the testimonies of ordinary soldiers, "linking individual life-stories to the wider narratives of the conflict" (Lumley 75). Individuals in Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's films are like pebbles thrown in a pond that form concentric circles. The circles are those of history, of politics, and finally of the cosmos, so that history becomes natural history.

To think of war as part of natural history is not, however, to risk naturalizing war. It is rather to regard the earth as integral to the meaning and perpetration of war. In a special issue of *Third Text* entitled "The Wretched Earth," Ros Gray and Shela Sheikh argue that "[l]andscapes and vegetation are not simply the backdrop against which violence and dispossession unfold, but are mobilised as the very medium of violence" (164). If we are to take the earth's own wretchedness seriously, then landscape is not only the "medium of violence" but its target. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's attention to the zealous destruction of the natural world suggests that ecocide is an integral, if not the exemplary, form of modern political violence. The opening frame of *Su tutte le vette è pace* shows a lone figure at the top of a precipice, casually surveying the landscape. The image echoes Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818). The title of the film is similarly ironic and iconic. It paraphrases a line from Goethe's *A Wanderer's Nightsong II* (1780): "Above all summits, it is calm."[19] But the film's titular summits do not symbolize the sublime overflowing of subjectivity, nor do they function as mere backdrop to the action. As in the phantom ride sequence discussed earlier, the mountains form a kind of primal scene of power, and as such they, too, suffer the violations perpetrated in war.[20]

The landscape is denaturalized by colouring, zooming, slow motion, and the addition of sound. Occasionally, zooming in on the film's decayed material dissolves the landscape altogether. [Figure 7].

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[19] Goethe's poem reads: "Above all summits/ it is calm/ In all the tree-tops/ you feel/ scarcely a breath;/ the birds in the forest are silent. / Just wait, soon/ you will rest as well."

[20] In a footnote of *Entering the Frame*, Lumley quotes Robert Musil's impression of "an uncanny turmoil in nature" as the result of bombings (78, n14).

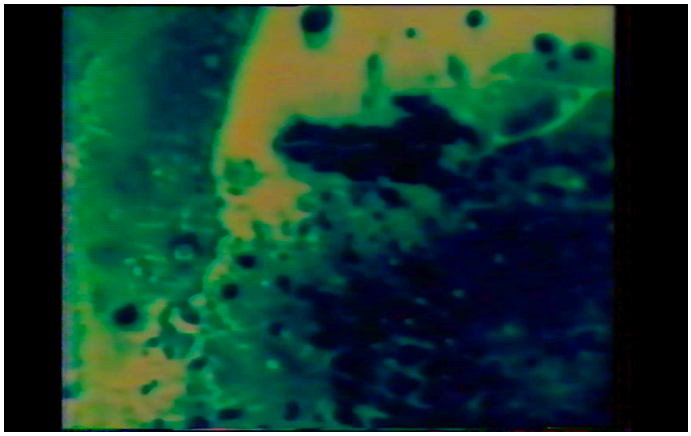

Figure 7. Abstraction, *Su tutte le vette è pace*

Defamiliarization renders the earth an alien place, and the soldiers deep in snow alien creatures. As in Werner Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness* (1992), an extra-terrestrial perspective is the result of a landscape disfigured by war. Moments of heightened abstraction produced by the decaying celluloid link the different materialities of the film: "[r]eferences to the 'wounded body' of the nitrate material speak of the damaged sprockets, mould, discolouration, and of the traces of blood and fingerprints…. human and historical memory and the 'memory' of the film material itself is treated as consubstantial" (Lumley 83). Such interlinking or levelling is both sobering and deeply affecting. It is an opposite gesture to the wishful salvaging of humanity from the dehumanizing wreckage of war that is the common practice of war commemoration.[21] Instead, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi remind us of the perishability humans exploit yet also share with the rest of the earth—a common destiny [Figure 8].

Figure 8. The common destiny of men, horses, and snow, *Su tutte le vette è pace*

[21] For a detailed critique of commemoration and the false salvaging of humanity, see chapter 1 of *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

The commonality of people, animals, and the earth is the creaturely sensibility that permeates Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's oeuvre. This parity of the living, mandated by war, is further evident among humans themselves, in the resolutely non-partisan representations of perpetrators and victims of violence. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's analytical method is unique in that it thinks power universally while situating it historically and geographically. But whether we are in Italy, the Dolomites, Libya, or Eritrea, power operates in similar ways, and the critique of violence is never narrowly ideological.

Pays Barbare (2013) begins on the 29th of April, 1945, the day after Mussolini's death. The caption reads "The Duce's Body," followed by a quote by Italo Calvino: "Having been at the origin of so many massacres that had no image to recall them, Mussolini's last images were those of his own massacre."[22] The sequence features a crowd, enraged, elated, clamoring around a small heap of bodies. The decision to begin here is significant because the film moves backwards to 1926, the Duce's "Napoleonic year," the realization of Italy's imperialist dream in Africa. Were it not for the captions, it would have been impossible to tell whether the desecrated bodies are those of fascists or their victims. The same degree of fervor that in 1922 propelled Mussolini to power is turned against him. In both images of crowds individual faces are clearly visible, yet the mass also functions as a unified organism [Figure 9]. In *Gravity and Grace*, Weil condemns the collective or "Great Beast" as "the only object of idolatry, the only *ersatz* of God" (164). *Pays Barbare*'s counter-intuitive opening bears this out in uncomfortable ways.

Figure 9. Crowds celebrating the death of Mussolini, 1945, *Pays Barbare*

In the second, chronologically earlier segment, Mussolini, revived, is seen on horseback or on foot taking part in rallies and military parades, amidst dignitaries or facing

[22] Calvino's quote appears in the autobiographical essay "The Duce's Portraits," *Hermit in Paris*. Martin McLaughlin, trans. Mariner Books, 2014, p. 219.

ecstatic crowds, not dissimilar from those that in the earlier sequence rejoiced over the Duce's dead body [Figure 10].

Figure 10. Crowds in support of Mussolini, 1926, *Pays Barbare*

Mussolini puffs his chest or places his hands on his hips. The crowds, Italian or Libyan, cheer elatedly. Each plays its part in what Susan Sontag called the "fascist dramaturgy." In "Fascinating Fascism" Sontag listed the key components of the "fascist aesthetics" as "a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, and extravagant effort; they exalt two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude […] the massing of groups of people; the turning of people into things; the multiplication of things and grouping of people/things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader figure or force. The fascist dramaturgy centers on the orgiastic transactions between mighty forces and their puppets. Its choreography alternates between ceaseless motion and a congealed, static, 'virile' posing" (Sontag 1975).[23] In the crowd and rally scenes that dominate the first half of *Pays Barbare*, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's "analytical camera" conducts a visual parsing of fascist theatricals.

IV. War at a Distance: Toxic Cinema

> Toxicity, in our colonial context, is an event only for the privileged while it composes a fundamental aspect of life for the colonized. — Dariouche Kechavarzi-Tehrani, "The Colonial Gas Machine"

The second half of *Pays Barbare* turns to the Second Italo-Abyssinian War (or Italo-Ethiopian War), which broke out on 3 October 1935. A caption denies the atrocities

[23] Sontag's argument about the resurgence of fascism as an aestheticization of politics has come under justified criticism. But her analysis of the binary logic of fascism remains persuasive. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi are similarly concerned with the resurgences of fascism, most explicitly in *Pays Barbare*. This accounts for the film's hint of didacticism. Throughout their work, perhaps due to its rootedness in the historical material, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi avoid the any simple or sweeping conclusions about fascism of the kind that Sontag's piece occasionally resorts to.

committed by Italian forces against the Ethiopian population. The first images are those of rotting animal carcasses strewn across a bleak terrain. The frames are sepia-coloured, and Gianikian's voiceover quotes Mussolini: "to end the rebellion, use the gas."

Some 800,000 Ethiopian troops under the command of Haile Selassie confronted a small but well-equipped Italian army of approximately 110,000 led by General Emilio De Bono. Crucial to Italy's advantage was its superior air force. In violation of the 1925 Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare (the Geneva Protocol), Italy deployed chemical weapons to quash Ethiopian resistance.[24] In his appeal to the Assembly of the League of Nations, in June 1936, Selassie stated:

> Special sprayers were installed on board aircraft so that they could vaporize, over vast areas of territory, a fine, death-dealing rain. Groups of nine, fifteen, eighteen aircraft followed one another so that the fog issuing from them formed a continuous sheet. It was thus that, as from the end of January, 1936, soldiers, women, children, cattle, rivers, lakes and pastures were drenched continually with this deadly rain. In order to kill off systematically all living creatures, in order to more surely to poison waters and pastures, the Italian command made its aircraft pass over and over again. That was its chief method of warfare. (Selassie 1936) [25]

Like nuclear and biological weapons, chemical warfare is implicated in the racialized histories of colonial oppression.[26] Gas can be deployed at a distance and may be invisible to the naked eye. Unlike conventional weapons, the effects of toxic gas are not limited to the point of impact, where bullet meets body, but threaten a basic (and symbolic) function of life: breath. As Léopold Lambert explains, chemical weapons illustrate that "we are not merely contained within an epidermic envelope, but, rather, that we extend into our atmospheric environment, the limits of which are indefinable" (Lambert 2017). The invisibility of chemical or radioactive agents also calls for a reconsideration of images, ones to represent what cannot be seen, across timespans that defy individual human life and comprehension. By superseding the spatiotemporal dimensions of human existence, weapons of mass destruction are a poignant reminder of the coinciding of human and natural history via the lingering presence of contaminants in soil, water, and air.

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[24] See Lina Grip and John Hart, "The use of chemical weapons in the 1935–36 Italo-Ethiopian War," SIPRI Arms Control and Non-proliferation Programme, October 2009, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Italo-Ethiopian-war.pdf, accessed 23 September 2018.

[25] Not until 1996, did Italy admit it used chemical weapons in Ethiopia.

[26] On the colonial origins of weapons of mass destruction, especially gas, see *The Funambulist* 14 special issue on "Toxic Atmospheres," 2017, https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/toxic-atmospheres. See also Anna Feigenbaum, *Tear Gas: From the Battlefields of World War I to the Streets of Today*. London: Verso, 2017.

In her discussion of the "poetics of care," De Rosa draws connections between Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi and writer Svetlana Alexievich. Indeed, a profound affinity exists between their projects, not only because, as Ricci Lucchi has said, their influences are literary (and painterly) rather than cinematic (Lumley 87), but because Alexievich, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2015, assembles "oral archives" of the survivors of war and of ecocide. In *Chernobyl Prayer*, for example, Alexievich does not report on the disaster from the outside, but from within the zone of catastrophe.[27] As the book's subtitle—*A Chronicle of the Future*—suggests, nuclear fallout inextricably links past and future in a new temporality whose scale is unprecedented. Human understanding will seek to adjust itself to this new scale, giving rise to new modes of expression and thought. In their own work, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi engage with earlier watershed moments of ecological transformation: the technologies of mass killing that culminated in the First World War, the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In particular, it is the phantom ride sequences in Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi that may be said to address the "eco-technological rewriting of the concept of nature."[28] A long sequence of aerial shots in *Pays Barbare* harks back to the phantom ride in *Dal Polo*, only this time the cameras are mounted on planes armed with sulfur mustard [Figures 11 & 12].

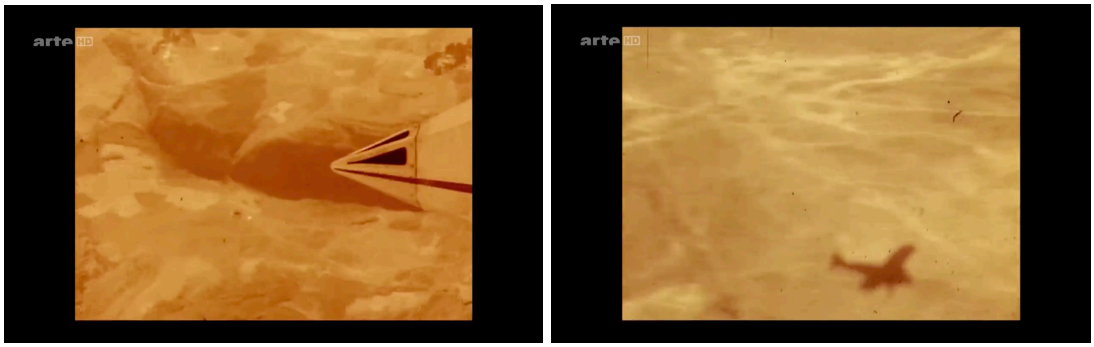

Figure 11 & 12. Aerial shots from military planes, *Pays Barbare*

Ruth Ben-Ghiat explains that Mussolini favored the use of chemical weapons against civilians, first in Libya, then in Ethiopia:

> These were used in quantities well beyond military necessity; Italy's massive employment of aviation and gas, along with the industrial scale of the mobilization, made Ethiopia an "experimental field of violence" for the next five years. (Ben-Ghiat, 2015, 2).

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[27] Svetlana Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future*. Anna Gunin and Arch Tait, trans. London: Penguin, 2013.

[28] "The Existence of the World Is Always Unexpected: Jean-Luc Nancy in conversation with John Paul Ricco. Jeffrey Malecki, trans. *Art in the Anthropocene*, p. 88.

"Between 1935 and 1939," she writes in *Fascist Modernities*, "in defiance of the 1925 Geneva Protocol bans on the use of chemical weapons, 617 tons of gas were shipped to Ethiopia. Together with slaughter from conventional weapons, gassings caused a quarter-million Ethiopian deaths by 1938" (126).

The barbarism of the title is, of course, reversed and refocused: from Italians' depiction of East Africans to Italians themselves. No longer victorious, the footage exposes the toxic landscapes of the Ethiopian war, whose legacy, as *Pays Barbare*'s parting words remind us, lives on.[29] The multitude of victims is reinscribed in the sequence precisely through their absence. But these are also and at the same time images of ecocide that insist on the embeddedness of people and place in the age of mass contamination.

Between the war trilogy and *Pays Barbare*, Gianikian and Ricci Lucci created *Topografia aerea* (2007), an installation piece. "The images," says Lumley, "give a vivid impression of war as seen 'from above.'" The flattened landscape begins to resemble a map. "Technology creates a visual spectacle and a distance from what is seen" (Lumley 96). The connections between cinema, war, and perception are laid bare through the repurposing of the aerial reconnaissance footage. But even here, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi do not abandon the individual perpetrator. From pilot diaries and testimonies, it appears that "the modern aviator does not hesitate to race by car to the downed enemy plane to extract souvenirs as his warrior ancestors had done before him" (Lumley 96). Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's images of war capture the co-presence in power of toxicity and intoxication, the false sense of indemnity power instils in those who momentarily wield it, and the effect on all who are caught in its deadly radius.

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A war film or a landscape film? The silhouettes of man and beast striving through the snow in *Su tutte le vette è pace* are key to Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's approach to political violence, which almost always comprises space and place as more than backdrop. I have argued that Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's analytical method is really a method of transformation and resistance, that their reworking of the archive breaks with the original footage in ways that articulate new ways of being and so enter the world as a real possibility. Central to these new configurations is an expansive, inclusive view of violence whose objects are vulnerable humans, animals, and the earth. By acknowledging the ecological inflections

[29] *Pays Barbare* closes with the chilling words: "Insolent and atrociously grotesque, fascism returns. We feel uneasy. We are plunged into a black night. We do not know where we are going. Do you?"

of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's work, by recognizing nonhumans and the environment as subjects in the primal scene of violence, a fuller appreciation of their project is made possible. If their films are not seen and discussed as ecocinema this is because Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's humanism has been too narrowly interpreted, and because viewers and commentators have yet to adjust their eyes to the half-light of a damaged multispecies world.

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